



The Black Musical Roots  
of the WOZQ Revolutions  
Department

maya smith

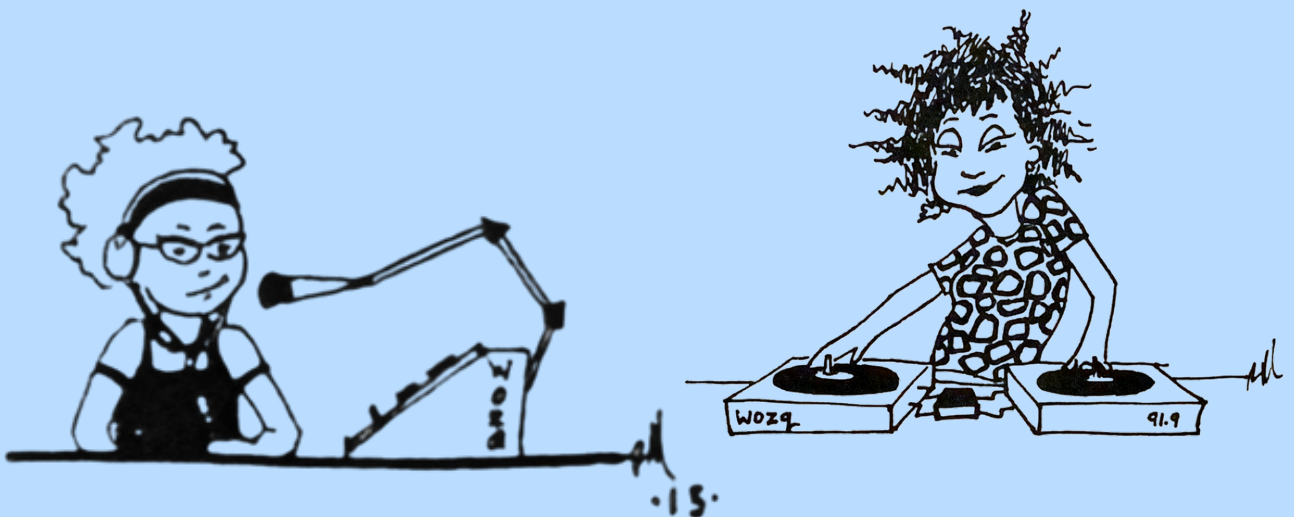
2025

WOZQ 91.9FM is Smith College's student-run radio station, a prominent organization on campus which provides students with the opportunity to host their own weekly radio show. Each student's show falls under one of four departments within WOZQ: General, Specialities, News, and Revolutions.

Little known by students today, the department title "Revolutions" has only been used by WOZQ since the spring 2009 semester.

**In fact.....**

From its inception through the fall of 2008, Revolutions was called the **URBAN** Department, and it revolved around Black musical genres.



The “urban contemporary” label was coined by DJ Frankie Crocker in 1974 to describe the assortment of Black musical genres he played on air at WBLS, based in New York.

The “urban” label spread quickly within the music industry, and in the context of radio programming it became the widely used umbrella term for any and all Black musical genres. The creation of urban music stations across the nation led to a rise in popularity of Black music, especially hip-hop.

DJ Frankie Crocker



College radio stations across the US played a vital role in hip-hop's rise in recognition, broadcasting it at a time when rap was considered the outcast of Black music genres.

WOZQ DJs in the 2000s



Anthony Kwame Harrison dubs the years 1980-1993 as “college radio’s hip-hop era.” He writes about the unique position of college radio stations to showcase music that might not have been played on commercial stations. According to Harrison, college radio was the only place to hear rap music on the radio in the 1980s.





Smith CSAC (Concerned Students of All Colors) protest in the 1980s

During the 1980-1993 period that Harrison discusses, there were countless incidents of racial violence against Black students on college campuses, Smith included. Amidst this discrimination, Black students looked to college radio to create a sense of community and belonging on campus.

One example of an influential Black college radio presence in the 1980s was the programming offered at WMUA 91.1FM, UMass Amherst's radio station!

an old WMUA logo!

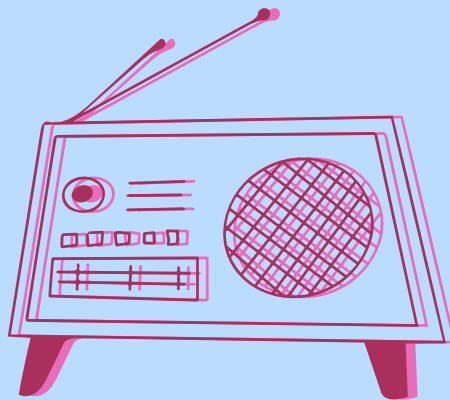


Just down the road from UMass Amherst, the WOZQ board of the late 1980s and early 1990s took enormous pride in its very alternative programming. While WOZQ did steadfastly provide alternative music to the nearby community, students largely promoted alternative rock and new wave (think Joy Division, Dead Can Dance, Siouxsie and the Banshees, etc...) which was a very white scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. WOZQ's affinity for the alternative rock scene meant that listeners were less likely to hear Black musical genres on air in the late 1980s and early 1990s until the Urban Department was created.

these lovely  
drawings of 90s  
WOZQ DJs show up  
within several  
archival issues  
of Dirt!



The first mention of the Urban Department's existence at WOZQ is in the 1993 issue of Dirt, WOZQ's zine. It is possible that fall 1993 was the first semester during which WOZQ ever had an Urban Department.



Considering Smith's long-standing relationship with UMass Amherst through the Five College Consortium, and the overlap in the broadcasting ranges of WMUA and WOZQ, it is highly possible that WOZQ's decision to create their Urban Department was influenced by the DJs over at WMUA.

The Urban Department being created in 1993 is also indicative of the growing interest in hip-hop from college radio stations across the country at the time. While WOZQ was a few years behind WMUA in their spotlighting of hip-hop, the 1993 emergence of the Urban Department indicates that the station was certainly paying attention to the rise in popularity of Black music in a college radio setting.

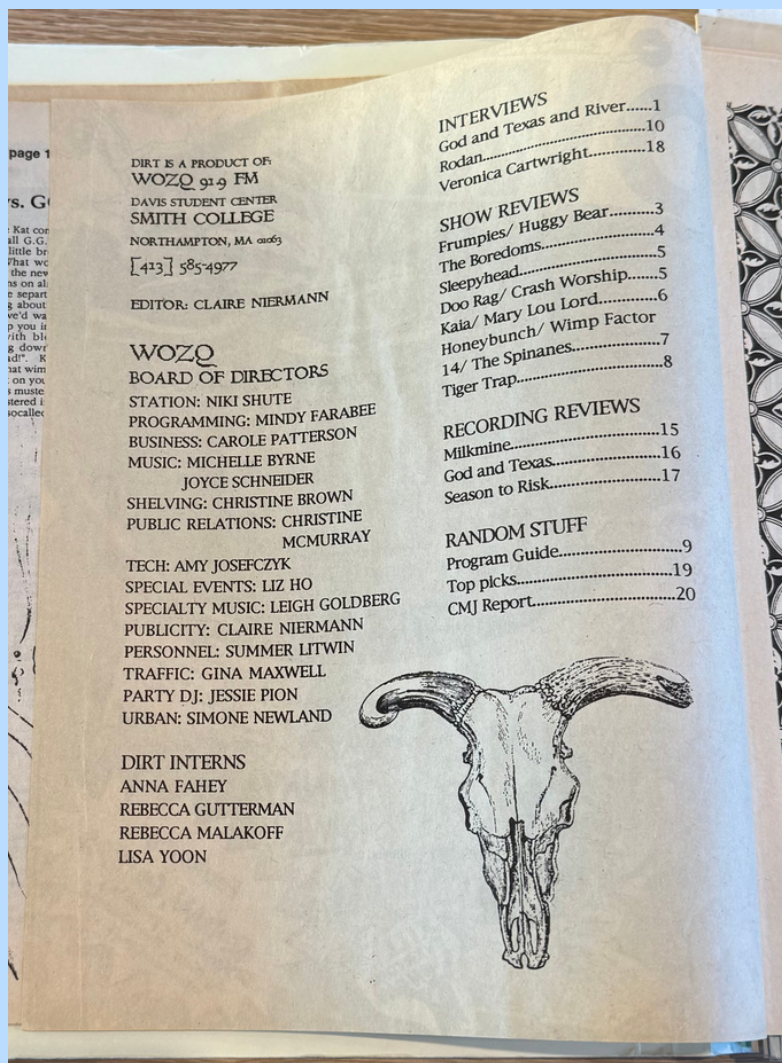


a DJ's journey through  
WOZQ's archive to trace the  
history of the Urban  
Department...

me in the booth in  
2024...



former urban dept director mary fuller in  
2004! you may recognize this photo from the  
beloved "Smith College Girls for i-D  
Magazine 2004" photoshoot by Richard Kern...



# 1993

the earliest  
mention I  
could find of  
the Urban  
Department's  
existence at  
WOZQ, from the  
fall 1993 Dirt

a student named Simone  
Newland is listed as the  
director of the  
department, but there is  
no other mention of the  
department or it's  
mission in this issue of  
Dirt...

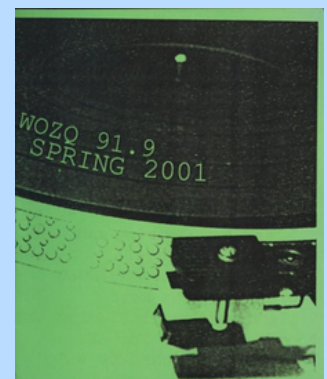




# 2001

|         | Monday                | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---------|-----------------------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| 6-8am   |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 8-10am  | GENERAL PROGRAMMING   |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 10-12pm |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 12-2pm  |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 2-4pm   |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 4-6pm   |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 6-8pm   | SPECIALTY PROGRAMMING |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 8-10pm  |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 10-12am | URBAN                 | GENERAL | URBAN     | GENERAL  | URBAN  |          |        |
| 12-2am  |                       |         |           |          |        |          |        |

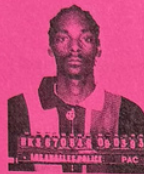
this programming guide shows us the blocks time in WOZQ's broadcasting schedule that were dedicated to "urban programming." During the Urban Department's run, urban programming typically commenced Wednesday to Saturday nights, 10pm-2am. FCC rules around explicit music often silo Black music to these late-night hours, threatening DJs w/ fines if explicit music plays. This restricts Black music programming to slots that have fewer listeners, making it even more difficult to hear "urban" music on air at WOZQ...



this Urban Department show application asks the question "what does "urban music" mean to you? what is its significance in today's world?" Earlier Urban Department DJ applications referenced specific genres that could be played on air (commonly hip-hop, r&b, etc.), but this 2007 application only references the term "urban" and does not define it. If only I could find the answers DJs had to these questions...

2007

WOZO Urban Department 2007  
Show Application



1. Number \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you been involved with radio before? ☐ A returning DJ?
3. Explain your passion for music, why you want to be part of the urban department, etc:
4. What does "urban music" mean to you? What is its significance in today's world?
5. Provide a sample of 5 songs (or artist in general) you might play on your show:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you envision to be your DJ name *and* show title, and why?
7. Urban time slots are Wednesday to Saturday night from 10 pm to 2 am. Are there any days or times that absolutely will not work for you?



2008

## WOZQ Smith Radio: It's Not Ju

*From Page 4*

When asked what they will play, Buglione explains that they fall under the urban category, so it will be a little Common, some Atmosphere, dance music and Nas. When I ask what urban means, she cringes. "Um, I don't know. We're having some trouble with that title. I mean we all know what it means, but what does it really mean? Ask Kayden." Kayden Moore '10 is the equally eloquent assistant station manager. He defers my urban question to Geraldine Richards '10, head of the urban department. Richards tells me "it's a term we're working on," and that she is even looking to professors for some suggestions. The problem is, essentially, that urban implies "black music made in the city," when really the music is not all black and it is not all made in the city. It encompasses blues, jazz, reggae, dancehall, rap, hip-hop, R&B and soca, which Richards describes as "music from Trinidad and Tobago... it sort of stands for the Soul of

Calypso." Other departments include specialty, general and news. Nastasi's "Beard Songs" will land in specialty, as will "Majesty of Space," a show that will explore music in the grandiose style of our universe. In the past, Meg Kearney '11J has done a poetry reading segment for news; Lombardo's love/hate songs will land in general. "The departments really work together to define each other," says Richards. You can listen to her show from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. on Thurs-days.

Fresh-faced and feeling pretty in their new cool-kid costume, WOZQ will be hosting lots of events, parties and concerts, including Rock Camp for Girls, a band whose Web site claims they "want to eradicate all the limiting myths about music and gender that make girls afraid to speak up, sing out and make noise." They are from Portland and will be at Smith on Nov. 11, courtesy of WOZQ. Jennifer O'Connor is performing at the Iron Horse with Great Lake Swimmers today, Sept. 25, and also will be in the WOZQ studios for an interview.

excerpt from  
a Sophian  
article about  
WOZQ from the  
fall 2008  
semester. aka  
the earliest  
evidence of  
WOZQ  
grappling  
with their  
use of the  
word urban  
that I found

"When I ask what urban means, she cringes"?! I noticed that to Smithies in 2008, the word urban "implies black music made in the city," an association that WOZQ clearly wanted to separate itself from. They seemed to feel that "urban" didn't properly represent the department because it wasn't just for playing Black music anymore...

looking back on Smith + the world in 2008, it is interesting to see that WOZQ's discomfort around the term urban coincided with the election of the nation's first Black president. Obama's presidential campaign (and historic win) spurred many campus conversations about a new "post-racial" America, aka one that has moved beyond centuries of rampant racism. Published just a few months before the election, this Sophian article illustrates the unique post-racial moment that WOZQ's board found itself in during the fall of 2008

wait! how can we be  
post-racial if we  
still say urban???



# 2009-2010

but the very next semester WOZQ's Urban Department was nowhere to be found... with zero formal announcements or explanations, WOZQ had quietly abandoned the Urban Department and introduced the "Revolutions" Department in spring 2009. Clearly, the discomfort that WOZQ was feeling as a station (and possible scrutiny from the Smith community) around the term urban was enough that they renamed the department in the middle of an academic year!

## revolutions [r]

the revolutions department of wozq is dedicated to providing smith college and the pioneer valley with "urban" music through radio programming, events and publications. the music within the revolutions department comes out of black culture but since has evolved to encompass various genres, artists, djs and listeners; the genres include jazz, hip hop, r&b, soul, electronica, dance, party, reggae, reggaeton, dance hall, etc.

despite this abrupt name change, I found that the Black musical roots of the department had not been fully erased yet. For a few more years the term "urban" remained in the department's mission statement, but it was no longer the all-encompassing descriptor for the department or its programming



the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement became a topic of national importance and discussion after Mike Brown's murder in Ferguson in 2014. 2014 and 2015 represent another unique American political moment, a racial reckoning which was felt across the country and on Smith's campus. Considering the conversations around Blackness and equity at the time, it is very interesting that it is during the 2014-2015 school year that the Revolutions Department's urban (aka Black) past is buried. Instead of taking this cultural moment to honor their past commitment to Black musical expression, WOZQ's board severed all traces of a space for Black music ever existing on air at the station.

a Black Lives Matter banner  
displayed on a Smith house,  
a common practice to date



2014

As a DJ, your show will be in one of four different departments. Please circle the department that you are applying for:  
**General | Revolutions | Specialties | News**

Are you a returning DJ? Circle one: **Yes | No**

If yes, please list the semesters when you participated and which department your show was in:

**On The Back:** Tell us about your show idea! Include your DJ name(s), show title, a short description of your show (to be used for our online programming schedule), and answer the question for the specific department you are applying to:

News- What excites you about information broadcasting or talk radio?

General- As a general department DJ, you will be required to play a lot of new releases, and it's expected that you will become familiar with new artists on a regular basis. How do you usually discover artists for your own collection?

Revolutions- How do you think the music played on your show will demonstrate revolutionary ideas?

Specialties- How does your show focus on a niche culture?

this 2014-2015 DJ application has no trace of the Revolutions Department's former life as a hub for hip-hop and other Black musical genres. The only question asked of potential DJs in the department is the incredibly vague: "how do you think the music played on your show will demonstrate revolutionary ideas?"

2023

#### • REVOLUTIONS

Revolutions is the department for all things alternative and activist! The Revolutions label can mean different things to different DJs, but generally Revolutions shows focus on alternative music movements and artists that challenge the status quo. This department is also the place to be if you want to use your show to spread awareness about social issues or conduct interviews in order to broadcast the voices of the under-represented. Revolutions DJs are expected to play 2 new releases per hour. If your music taste falls outside the mainstream, or if you just have something revolutionary to say, apply now!

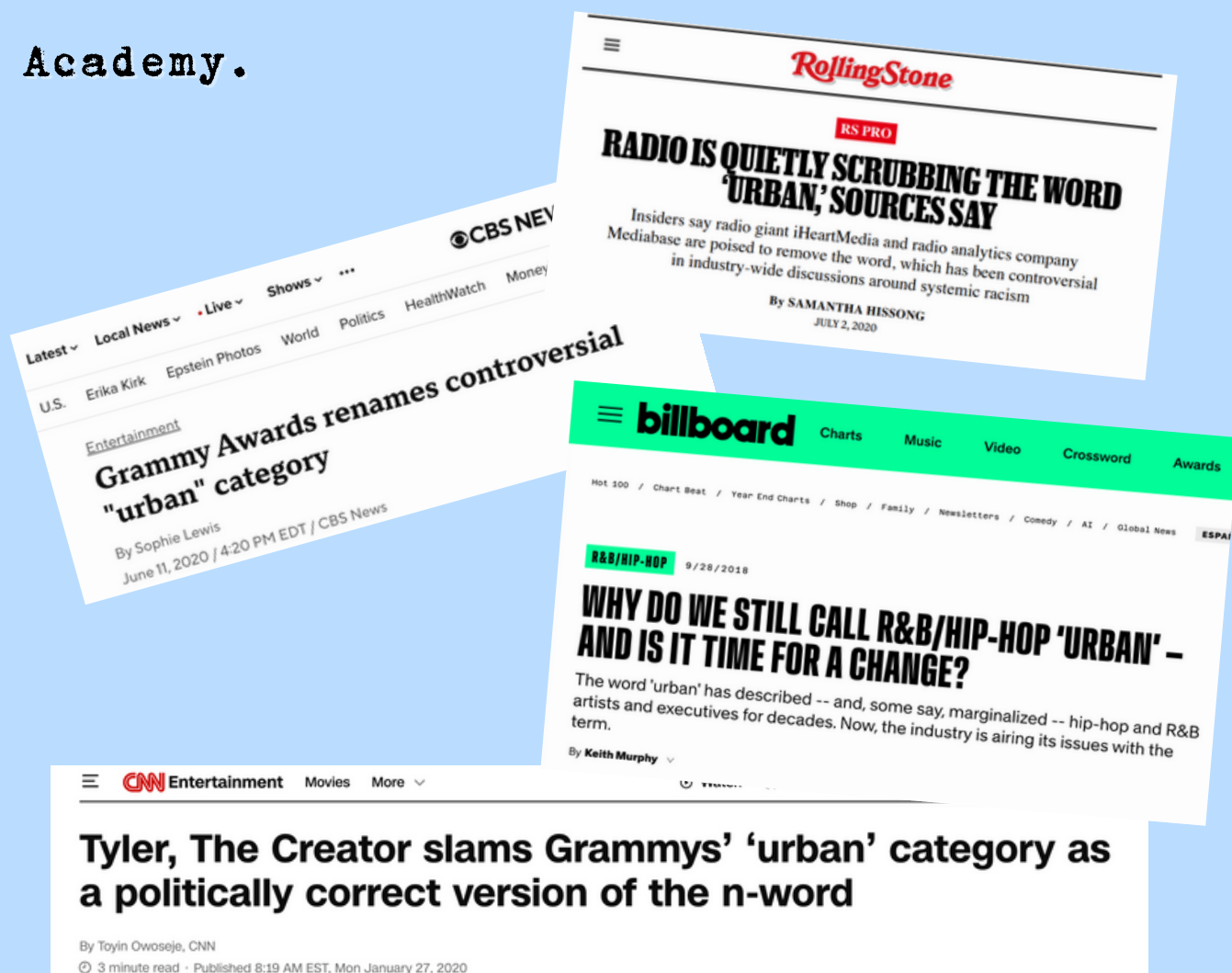
the description of the Revolutions Department in the current DJ application shows us how drastically the department's mission and programming has changed since 2009...

Today, shows in the Revolutions Department are understood by students to be centered around: social and political commentary, music journalism, activism, and discussions of revolutionary ideas that "challenge the status quo." In my years at Smith shows have covered topics like the punk scene, folk music, DIY music scenes, lesbian musical artists, riot grrrl, music and art from socialist countries, building revolutionary optimism, and more.....

While it is incredible that WOZQ can provide a space for these radically important themes to be explored on air, all connections to the department's original mission of prioritizing Black music have been forgotten. A past forgotten so quickly that a DJ + WOZQ Board Member with a passion for all things archival had no clue the Urban Department ever even existed, let alone for 15+ years!

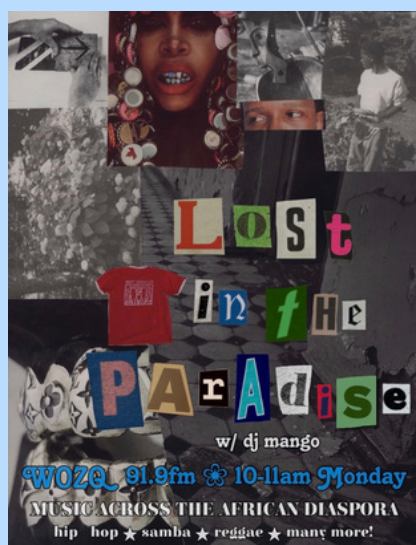


While the nation at large did not move to retire the term “urban” in the music industry until around 2018–2020, WOZQ had reckoned with its implications and decided to do away with the term over a decade earlier, realizing the harm it does to Black artists long before mainstream commercial radio stations or the Recording Academy.



Although the Revolutions Department is no longer the epicenter of WOZQ's Black music programming, this does not mean that Black music has no home at WOZQ today. Many students host shows centered around hip-hop and other Black musical genres (including me!), just as they did during the era of the Urban Department. These shows are now housed within the Specialties or General Departments, and not relegated to late-night slots on specific days. The Black musical roots of the WOZQ Revolutions Department might have been let go over time, but the Urban Department's legacy lives on forever in the continued broadcasting of Black music by student DJs on air at Smith!

some of my old show posters :)



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